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WHY A LABOR PARTY?

Draft Resolution Approved by the Plenum of the
National Committee, Communist Party (Opposi-
tion).

I. PRESENT ECONOMIC SITUATION

1. The revival in production and exchange, occasioned by the numerous artificial stimuli administered by the Roosevelt Administration, has fallen far short of the expectations of the New Dealers. The decisive indices have for months been either stagnant or going downward. The present levels continue lower than the "flush" days of the summer of 1933, despite the momentary spurt recently brought on by seasonal factors and by the improvement in confidence resulting from Roosevelt's entente cordiale with Biggest Business.

A Year of Codified Chaos

2. Industrial employment and payrolls fell markedly in November. The relief rolls continue to mount. Private industrial production has not been revived in spite of billions of dollars in subsidies through the New Deal. Unemployment continues not only grave but mounting. The first year of the New Deal has proved to be a year of most rapid concentration of wealth, extension of monopoly and impoverishment of the masses. One year of the New Deal, of capitalist planning, has turned out to be a year of codified, of planned, chaos. The very machinery of the New Deal has broken down. The New Dealers, deserting the very foundations of their plans, (abandonment of price-fixing, etc.) are in full retreat.

II. PRESENT POLITICAL SITUATION

1. Outstanding among the new developments in the political life of the country is the accelerated and tremendous growth of the government bureaucracy. With the extension of government participation in ever-more phases of economic and social

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life of the country, state capitalism continues to develop at a terrific pace, bringing with it an ever-greater merging of the machinery of government with the machinery of big business.

2. Dissatisfaction remains widespread but vague, confused, and hesitant. In this fashion the growing feeling for something new and different manifested itself in an endorsement of Roosevelt as a symbol of those forces seeking something new and different but still safe. The discontent is still far from the level of nation-wide radicalization. Its very medium of expression, overwhelmingly within the framework of the two party system, momentarily thru the Democratic Party, is itself an index of the lack of any revolutionary upsurge in the United States.

Democratic Party Is Instrument of Big Business

3. The victory of the Democratic Party was complete, particularly in a mid-term election. Adroit maneuvering by the White House, skillful and timely use of the relief funds, inept and disjointed resistance by the Republican Party, as well as lack of program and orientation by the latter, account much more than Democratic achievements for the Roosevelt victory. All in all, Biggest Business today finds the Democratic Party a more suitable and fitting instrument of the times.

Republican Party Is Far From Crushed

4. Tho badly defeated, the Republican Party is far from crushed. In the face of a Democratic landslide, it still managed to draw nearly 42 out of every hundred popular votes as against the Democrats' 54. Its actual strength is greater than its voting strength in the House and Senate. It is presently in a crisis, arising out of the shifts in class composition and newly developing class realignments, flowing from five years of continuous economic crisis. Momentarily, the Republican Party has been rudely shaken in the rural sections, its erstwhile tower of strength. Merely because its dominant leadership has so far stubbornly clung to the threadbare phrases of stand-patism and obstinately refused to readjust itself in the least, does not mean that the Republican Party is

to be written off. It continues as the second pillar of the two-party system, still serving as the foundation of political reaction in the country.

Insignificant Vote for Communist and Socialist Party

5. Except in isolated localities, the vote of the working class parties, Communist and Socialist, was utterly insignificant. Amongst the great mass of the working class population, as well as amongst the toiling masses in the rural areas, both the Socialist and the Communist Party are of no serious consequence.

The Two-Party System Remains

6. The social and economic consequences of the crisis are shaking the foundations of the whole American political system, the two-party system. From the classical party of state rights, the Democratic Party is being transformed into the Party of aggressive, centralized government executive power. From the Party of the "little fellow," it has become the Party of the very biggest magnates, the Party of closer collaboration with Big Business than any Republican administration ever was. The Democratic Party has become the instigator of trustification and the organizer of the monopolists. The Party of Jefferson and Jackson has become the Party of Wilson and Roosevelt—from the Party for the preservation of Jeffersonian traditions and "democratic rights," it has become the Party brazenly and boldly demanding and hastening ever-increasing power of the executive arm of the government at the expense of the legislative and of the enhancement of the powers of the Federal Government at the expense of the States. Precisely because the Republican Party has, to date, continued its archaic approach, clinging desperately to the rather dull appeal of rugged individualism, it has lost its favored position to the Democrats. It has not yet recovered from its 1932 defeat. It continues torn by contradictory forces reflecting new political factors in their embryonic stages. Some Republican strategists try to alarm and arouse Wall Street support by blowing the old Hoover horns which were so decisive-

ly discredited in the 1932 campaign. Others, fearing the encroachment of Big Business and concentrated government executive power, try to pick up the Jeffersonian appeals, discarded by the Democratic Party, to stir the people with the feeble echoes of cries sounded more than a century ago. In both cases the Republican Party's strategy is bad and mirrors the process of confused readjustment and reorganization. However, unless some new political factor arises, the Republican Party, because of its still great popular base, will be able to come back at the expense of the inevitable failures of the Democratic Party and the unavoidable weakening of the still-flourishing Roosevelt myth.

Elements of Decay of Two-Party System

7. The forces undermining the two-party system continue to develop. The sweeping endorsement in the last election for the Democratic Party is much more a vote going across and beyond party lines than a Democratic victory. What we now have in the Democratic Party is a momentary but monstrous hodge-podge. Recent years have witnessed a marked trend towards all important legislation being enacted by Congress thru votes based much more on bloc and economic sectional lines cutting across Party lines rather than by means of Party lines. The differences arising over legislation in Congress are becoming increasingly differences *within* rather than *between* Parties, in utter disregard of so-called traditional Party differences. These trends are a reflection of the deep-going process of changing class relations occasioned and precipitated by the economic forces let loose by the crisis. Further manifestations of the disintegrating two-party system are to be found in the mood amongst the masses expressing themselves in one direction around such figures as Bilbo and Long in the hitherto solid Democratic South, and in another direction, in the "Epic" outbreak of Sinclair in California, once a rock-ribbed Republican satrapy, the victory of La-Follette's Progressive Party in Wisconsin, and in Olsen's so-called Farmer-Labor Party victory over the Roosevelt-Farley machine in Minnesota.

Government As Strike-Breaker

8. Like a red thread thru the unfolding new political situation in all its varied manifestations, runs the unbroken tendency of the government to multiply and intensify its activities as a strike-breaker.

III. LABOR IN THE PRESENT SITUATION

1. In a political sense labor's articulate strength is today insignificant. The general staff of the biggest body of organized labor in the country, the A. F. of L., is still wedded to the clap-trap of political non-partisanship, to the suicidal policy of "reward your friends and punish your enemies", to the policy of rejecting and resisting independent working class political action.

Unrest Mounts In Working Class

2. But amongst the workers discontent and unrest are mounting. Witness the great influx into the trade unions. Note the country-wide strike wave, the rising militancy in strike struggles, the increasing sympathy for striking workers and the rise of sympathetic and general strikes. A significant index of this growing dissatisfaction, of this first stage of radicalization, is the increasing interest in and support of independent working class political action in the form of a Labor Party. Within recent months numerous locals of the A. F. of L. have taken up this issue with system and persistency. Likewise, such powerful international unions as the United Textile Workers of America, the International Ladies Garment Workers and the Hotel and Food Workers have strongly endorsed the demand for a Labor Party.

Structural Changes In Working Class

3. The crisis has set in motion forces hastening the transformation of the whole structure of the American working class. The weakening of United States imperialism's position in the world market, as a result of the international crisis and the American crisis, has served to undermine seriously the base of the labor aristocracy. Thus, the

gap between the latter and the rest of the working class has been narrowed. Skill lines and demarcations between skilled and unskilled and semi-skilled have become fainter. Even the Executive Council of the A. F. of L. at the last convention recognized the vanishing of craft lines. On the breadlines, black and white workers alike have suffered the same misery and been subject to miserable "relief". The complete disappearance of immigration as a factor has served to weaken the division between foreign-born and native worker. The very composition of the trade union movement, the A. F. of L., has been organically altered. In short, five years of the devastating economic crisis have witnessed a marked increase in the homogeneity of the working class in the United States.

4. Regardless of what significant developments have occurred in the political situation, as a result of the crisis, one factor, from labor's point of view, continues dominant and decisive to distinguish the American political situation from that prevailing in all other leading countries. In the United States, the workers have yet to break from the political parties of their enemy class and to organize themselves politically as a class, as a distinct mass working class party on a nation-wide basis.

IV. THE ORGANIZATION OF A LABOR PARTY

1. In the sharpest contrast to the wave of militant strikes is the absence of a mass political party of the working class which can mobilize millions of workers. In fact, the United States is the one highly developed country under capitalist democracy in which the great bulk of the working class is not yet politically independent. The mass of workers has yet to learn that their economic struggle must be supported by political struggle, if the fruits of even the most victorious economic conflict are not to be lost thru some government measure (injunction, use of troops, appointment of Study Commissions). This has been the experience of labor time and again primarily because many workers who fight the employers on the economic field (trade unions) support the boss-

es on the political field (Democratic and Republican Parties) on a national, state-wide and municipal basis. No real improvement of their immediate conditions is possible for the workers, and, still more, no abolition of the whole capitalist system and exploitation and oppression is conceivable while the workers continue so unorganized and even fighting against each other on the political field.

Labor's Declaration of Independence

2. A vital next step in developing the class consciousness and defending the class interests of the proletariat is the establishment of a mass Labor Party of the workers who (in alliance with the impoverished farmers) will wage the immediate struggle against the Republican and Democratic Parties. Such a Party will unite, regardless of individual differences, all existing workers' organizations, trade unions, workers' political parties and groups, cooperatives and workers' fraternal organizations around the issue of independent working class political action. Such a Labor Party will be based not on individual membership but on organizations of labor, primarily the trade unions as its basic units—membership by organization and bloc. The formation of a Labor Party will signify for the workers thus affiliated thru their respective organizations the beginning of their political emancipation, historically speaking the next big progressive step. Politically, it would mean the declaration of independence by the American working class from the big parties of capital.

3. No worker can or should (and least of all the Communist worker) demand that the Labor Party should be a revolutionary party or even a party radical enough to accept Communist leadership. It is not at all improbable that at the outset there may be "at the head of the Labor Party reformist Labor traitors, similar to those in England, or even worse. Nevertheless, the formation of such a party may, for a time, represent a definite step forward in the American labor movement and the Communist Party (the Communist movement) is obliged to participate in this party,

if only the latter permit, in a sufficient degree, freedom of criticism and agitation by the affiliated organizations." (Resolution of Executive Committee Communist International—1925).

Labor Party as Against Third Party

4. The Labor Party is not a party of the most advanced and conscious militants in the working class. Therefore, the Labor Party cannot be the organization that will seize and hold political power or bring final victory to the working class. This is the historic task of the Communist Party. The Labor Party can and must be made to serve as an organization for advancing, in the largest measure possible, the immediate interests and the elementary political consciousness of the working class and thus check the political aggressiveness of the bourgeoisie.

5. One cannot underscore too heavily the distinction between a Third Party and a genuine Labor Party. In the specific, concrete, American situation a Third Party would be a third capitalist party, expressing the interests of the petty-bourgeoisie and serving as an instrument in the hands of the lower middle class against the higher and bigger capitalists. Such a capitalist, third party would substantially be committed, like the Republican and Democratic Parties, to the maintenance and perpetuation of capitalism as a system. Only, it would seek to achieve this thru defending the interests of another section (the smaller) of the owning class. As such, a Third Party represents a class having interests fundamentally different from those of the working class, and would be a party of different class composition and leadership from that of a Labor Party. To the extent that Third Party forces worm their way into a Labor Party movement, they hinder its development into a distinct Party of the proletariat breaking politically with the capitalist class, with the capitalist system.

V. HISTORICAL BASIS OF A LABOR PARTY IN THE UNITED STATES

1. Why does the development toward a mass party of the workers in the United States take the form of a Labor Party? Why a Labor Party

based on the trade unions, on collective membership, in the United States and Social-Democratic Parties based on individual membership in other countries? In those countries where the organization of the trade unions preceded the organized mass political expression of the working class, (England, Belgium, United States, etc.), there, the Labor Party type developed. On the other hand, in those countries where they had the Social-Democratic type of Party, (Russia, France, Germany, etc.), we find that there the trade union organization came afterward and was organized by the mass political organization of the workers.

2. What is the basis of these variations of working class development? In certain countries (England, Belgium, United States, etc.) industrial monopolist, or imperialist, development split the working class, at an early date, into two parts—into an aristocratic group of better paid and the rest, the vast majority of unskilled, semi-skilled, underpaid and unorganized. In these countries the trade unions were formed first and the political parties much later. The labor aristocracy, split apart from the rest of the working class, found that it could satisfy its demands thru a limited form of organization, like a craft union. The labor aristocracy developed a bourgeois ideology and in part, for a time, even its material interests coincided with those of the bourgeoisie. The great majority of the working class, the real proletariat, thus deprived of the better organized and more educated workers, was, at first, unable to organize itself even on a limited trade union scale, let alone on the broad, all-inclusive, general class or political scale.

Some American Peculiarities

3. Why has a Labor Party not yet developed in this country? In the United States the split in the working class was intensified by the reinforcement of the division between skilled and unskilled by the division into native and foreign born. The bourgeois ideology and bourgeois political organization in working class ranks was also historically intensified by the prolonged period of relative economic opportunity, the lack of class

fixity, and the consequent bourgeois-mindedness of the working class. These and similar historical peculiarities explain the fact that the American working class has not yet even reached the stage of a labor party as have the workers of England and Belgium.

4. However, once the labor aristocracy felt its privileges being undermined, hundreds of thousands of unskilled and semi-skilled workers poured into the unions, which but yesterday were primarily the organizations of skilled, aristocratic workers. With the sharpened attacks of the capitalists and their government on these privileges and on the very trade union organizations themselves (thru court decisions, etc.) came the first steps towards political organization—a working class political party based on the trade unions, a Labor Party. This was the historical process in Great Britain and this has been the historical process slowly unfolding itself and still very far from completed in the United States.

VI. BASIC FACTORS FOR A LABOR PARTY

1. The slogan for a Labor Party is fully in line with the present stage of development of class-consciousness in the American labor movement. It appeals particularly to the hundreds of thousands of militants and progressives in the trade unions who are ready to band themselves against capitalism as a social system but still find the Communist and Socialist parties too radical, too sectarian, and numerically insignificant.

2. Given the present low stage of class-consciousness in the United States, the Labor Party slogan is the only one that will appeal to the whole working class, regardless of where its particular sections stood but yesterday or still stand today politically. It makes the broadest appeal against the so-called, non-partisan politics of the reactionary bureaucracy in the unions.

Workers Forced To React Politically

3. The very marked growth of a powerfully centralized government in the United States, with its vast bureaucracy extending its hands daily into more walks of life, itself tends increasingly to

lend a political character to the every day struggles of the workers. More and more the government is intervening against the workers in their struggles for decent conditions, better pay and the right to organize. Particularly, under the N.R.A. does the government play an ever-greater and more diversified role as a strike breaker. The objective logic of this whole trend is a condition in which the workers are more and more compelled to react against the government, to resist its measures, to react and act politically. Here is a basic factor for a Labor Party.

4. The very growing homogeneity of the American working class is also a primary factor for a Labor Party movement. The narrowed base of the labor aristocracy, the reduced gap between the skilled and the unskilled, the softening of the differences between the foreign and native-born due to the end of immigration, are among the forces making for a more unified working class; that is, for the proletariat being able to act more unitedly and more on a general class basis, on a national mass political basis.

Labor Party To Resist Fascist Measures

5. The Labor Party question assumes special timeliness and interest for the greatest mass of workers in the face of certain features of the New Deal in its larger aspects. Under the guise of "impartiality" and "social interests" the New Dealers are working up step by step a technique for government ownership of the unions, in reality for corporate or Fascist unions, for sapping the very life-blood of the trade unions, as genuine labor organizations—all ostensibly in behalf of a so-called larger or more social interest! Besides, Roosevelt's much over-advertised program of social legislation will only become an obstacle to genuine social legislation and a source of still more and greater burdens imposed on the workers, unless they organize themselves politically as a class in defense of their own interests.

Union Growth As Base For Labor Party

6. The developing fighting mood among the workers has given rise in recent months to a

great expansion of the A. F. of L., to a vast influx of masses, about 2 millions, mainly unskilled and semi-skilled, into the trade unions. In this influx of masses we find not only a great force for the reorganization of the craft unions into industrial unions, for setting up a new structural form for the whole A. F. of L. but also for the bona-fide unions, sooner rather than later, serving as the basis for a Labor Party movement. Hence, the Labor Party issue is today more timely than it has been in at least ten years.

VII. OUR OBJECTIVES AND STRATEGY IN THE LABOR PARTY CAMPAIGN

1. The Communists, as the vanguard of the proletariat, must not only be able to point out clearly the objective basis of this trend towards a Labor Party in the United States. We must also be able to stimulate this historically progressive trend in a country which has relatively the most politically backward working class in the world.

2. "Why must the Communists act thus? Because it is their task to remain in closest contact with the masses in order to influence the latter continually in a revolutionary sense. However, mere agitation and propaganda, even the best, is not sufficient for revolutionary influence on the masses. For this purpose the masses require their own revolutionary experience. They can obtain essential elements of this experience in the Labor Party, even tho the latter be directed by reformists. In that case the masses, after their disappointments, will learn to know the treasonable role of the petty-bourgeois reformists, and that is very important. Furthermore, they will gain valuable experience in the independent political organizations of the working class". (E.C.C.I. resolution—1925).

Trade Union Masses Must Be Aroused

3. Our agitation for a Labor Party is not something abstract based merely on our analysis, but is to be tied up with the every day immediate interests of the workers, particularly the burning need for social insurance, the right to organize,

the menace of company unions, etc. It is on this basis that the Labor Party movement will serve as a most effective weapon for breaking down the prejudices against independent working class political action spread among the working masses thru generations by the capitalists. It is in this sense that the Labor Party will serve as a further entering wedge into great masses of workers whom we have not been able to reach directly thru their immediate struggles or who are not yet approachable with the direct Communist appeal.

4. Every bona fide trade union and labor organization, regardless of color or nativity of its membership, so long as it is opposed to the capitalist class political parties (Democratic and Republican) should be affiliated to the Labor Party and be part of the Labor bloc participating under one banner in the election campaigns. Every such affiliated body maintains its own distinct organization as part of the federated Labor Party and has the right to engage in constructive criticism as well as exercise full freedom for propagating its own principles. Inside the Labor Party every organization (Communist, Socialist, trade union) has a right to try to have its members nominated as standard-bearers on the Labor Party ticket in the elections.

Role Of The Communists

5. Thru our model constructive activity among the labor party organization and members, we Communists should be able not only to draw the more militant and advanced workers into our ranks but should also be able to help move the whole organization leftward. In both fashions we will be thus laying a better basis for a healthy, united, mass Communist Party in the United States.

6. We should not connect the Labor Party with any aims achievable only by a Communist Party; such as the Proletarian Dictatorship, Soviet Power, etc. At the same time we must conduct, constructively, campaigns inside the Labor Party for more leftward demands, attuned, of course, to the need of maintaining the broadest organizational

base for the Labor Party. Given such broad unity of action thru a Labor Party, we have here an engine of effective mass struggle against Fascism, War, and capitalist reaction in general.

VIII. CONCLUSIONS

1. The Communist Party (Opposition) should, thru propaganda, agitation and thru its influence in the trade unions, do everything in its power to stimulate and hasten the historical process of a Labor Party development in the United States. In our doing this, we are hastening the transformation of the workers from pawns of the two big bourgeois political parties into conscious forces moving and fighting in their own behalf.

2. While recognizing the great likelihood that a Labor Party would, at the outset, have a confused program, lacking clarity in its policies, inadequate from the proletarian revolutionary viewpoint, it would still mark a distinct forward step for the American working class.

3. The development of a mass Communist movement rooted in the soil of the country is in very large measure bound up with the development of a genuine mass Labor Party movement. Thru constructive activities, thru systematic, Marxist-Leninist education, the C.P.O. can, today, as a banner bearer in the fight for a Labor Party, or tomorrow, thru the unified Communist Party being part of an existing Labor Party, tremendously enhance its mass influence and help insure a mass base for a Communist Party, the foundation for a proletarian dictatorship and a socialist society in the United States.

Dec. 31, 1934.